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Lessons in Leadership By Executive Director Sean T. Casey



Around mid-October each year, we ask those of you who have served in the armed forces to share your names so we in turn can express our appreciation for your service on Veteran's Day. The list is always

significant in length, and every branch of the military is represented. While my thanks is sincere, it always feels like so little for so much. In addition to the sacrifices those of you in uniform make for our freedom and safety, you also provide a fine example to which we can aspire in our own organization. I'm reminded of the 11 Principles of Army Leadership, guidelines which turned 70 years old this year. Most documents, including our own Constitution, evolve over time, but interestingly, these Principles remain constant.

And any good leader can apply their wisdom:

Know yourself and seek self-improvement. In the military, confident decision-making can mean the difference between life and death. While other professions, like emergency response and health-care, have similarly high stakes, most of us don't hold someone's life in our hands. However, our decisions do impact others financially and personally, particularly so in public service. Knowing yourself is important.

Be technically and tactically proficient. Every career field has weapons and tools. At Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA), ours may be software, Assistive Work Technology, or durable medical equipment. Know your resources, and know how to use them tactically and strategically.

Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions. We all make good decisions, and

we all make mistakes. When the latter happens, assume responsibility, and look for solutions.

Set the example. Just like servicemen and women look for leadership in their commanders, those we lead in the workplace look for character and integrity in us. As you do business, someone is always watching. Let ethical decision-making be your guide.

Know your people and look out for their welfare. At GVRA, we say our clients and claimants always come first, and our coworkers are a close second. Make sure your words and actions demonstrate that your team's best interest is a priority.

Ensure the task is understood, supervised, and accomplished. I recently attended a training with a group of 13 coworkers. We performed a warmup activity in which we passed a ball around the room, initially with no explanation and no goal. We took our time. Later, when a time limit was set, and progressively lowered, we increased our speed with each round. We all respond well to clearly defined expectations. Good workers appreciate being held to high standards and knowing what those standards are.

Keep your people informed. Information in the military reduces panic, fear, and disharmony. The same is true in your workplace. Err on the side of overcommunicating.

Develop a sense of responsibility among your people. In any workplace, people may have different roles, but you all share a mission. Ours is creating employment and independence for people with disabilities. Establish a sense of ownership for that mission, and you'll find ownership breeds responsibility.



Train your people as a team. Cohesiveness in a military unit—and an office—is important. Learning together promotes professional bonding and helps the "unit" function seamlessly in times of crisis.

Make sound and timely decisions. True professionals can handle a yes or no; it's the "land of maybe" that creates insecurity. Make decisions as quickly as realistically possible.

Employ your work unit in accordance with its capabilities. Know your people. Know their skills. Let them use their talents, and

challenge them, but be realistic in your demands.

While the Army's leadership principles lay out practical guidance, I learn intangibles from my military coworkers every day. This Veterans Day, I thank you for their ethics, integrity, discipline and character. Most of all, I thank you for my freedom.

Happy Veterans Day.

GAB Con Getting the Word Out

In October, Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) had the honor of bringing a message of inclusion to the Georgia Association of Broadcasters (GAB) Annual Convention in Savannah. For more than two years, GVRA has been a partner in GAB's Public Education Program, scoring an opportunity to promote its programs and services on all of Georgia's network television outlets and more than 100 radio stations statewide at a deeply discounted rate.

Executive Director Sean T. Casey delivered the keynote speech at the convention's annual Honors brunch

"When I first joined GVRA two years ago this week, one recurring theme I heard was that we were the best kept secret in town. Today, with the Georgia Association of Broadcasters' help sustaining our ongoing television and radio campaign, the secret is out," Casey said. "So how else can we do good work together? The people in this room have the power, the voice, the platforms, and the tools to help shift the narrative about disability."

It's easy to lean on the traditional,

inspirational story to close out a broadcast with a human interest segment, he told the audience, but he encouraged news agencies to reflect individuals with disabilities in empowering roles.

"You as broadcasters can help us dispel the myth that hiring a person with a disability poses a greater risk to the employer's bottom line. Studies show just the opposite," Casey explained, citing a survey of major employers that showed, one year after hire, 85% of employees with disabilities in the sample group remained on the job, versus just 40% of their peers.

At the convention, GAB honored Gov. Nathan Deal with the Georgian of the Year Award. Casey accepted the award in the Governor's absence.



Get to Know a Legislator This Month We Feature Doreen Carter



A native Georgian and lifelona resident of DeKalb County, Doreen Roberson Carter received her Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree in Accounting from The J. Mack

Robinson College of Business at Georgia State University and earned a Masters in Business Administration (MBA) degree from the Michael J. Coles School of Business at Kennesaw State University. She also holds a Masters (M.A.) degree in Theology from Life Christian University.

In November of 2015, Doreen Carter was elected to serve as State Representative of House District 92, which includes Rockdale County and the southern-most part of DeKalb County, including a portion of the new city of Stonecrest. She is a member of the following standing committees: Code Revision, Education, Small Business Development and Special Rules. Additionally, Carter was elected by her peers to serve as treasurer of the Georgia Legislative Black Caucus. Representative Carter has embraced her role in the Georgia General Assembly and executed several initiatives as a new legislator. Specifically, she introduced legislation to address blight, which affects neighborhoods throughout Georgia. In addition, Carter co-sponsored a bill to train service providers on how to detect and assist victims of domestic violence. She also established an annual

event designed to educate, inform and enhance awareness of women's heart disease, which is held during the month of February in conjunction with the national "Go Red For Women" campaign. Carter's hard work and dedication has been recognized by her colleagues, as she is the recipient of the 2016 Georgia Legislative Black Caucus Freshman Legislator of the Year Award.

Doreen Carter is no stranger to politics. In 2014, she won the Democratic nomination for Georgia's Secretary of State and received over one million votes in the general election. Additionally, Carter was elected to Lithonia City Council in 2007 and served four years. During her tenure, she led fiscal reform efforts, which positioned the city for positive economic growth.

Often referred to as "Chief Community Officer," Representative Carter is known for her unwavering support of the East Metro area and identifying opportunities to improve the lives of residents and businesses in the district. She is an effective leader who advocates for vibrant communities and has a strong interest in education, public safety and economic development. Carter served as chair of the East Metro DeKalb CID formation committee, which is the first Community Improvement District in South DeKalb. She is a Leadership DeKalb alumna, past president of the Greater Lithonia Chamber of Commerce, and currently serves on the Brownfield Revolving Loan Fund Committee. Carter is an accountant by trade, and owns a financial education company. She is a widow, and resides in Lithonia, Georgia with her three sons.



BEP Gets Cooking Vendors Explore New Options

Under the direction of Bobby Goodman, BEP Program Manager, the Business Enterprise Program sponsored a mini food show (presented by Horizon Food Brokers) to expose blind vendor clients to a new way of providing food service to their customers. The concept provides different food selections from well-known brands of hot dishes, cookies and drinks, all displayed through various food stations. The concept will save blind vendor clients on labor costs. The BEP will begin rolling out these setups at some of their locations soon. Stay tuned.





Writing Her Own Story One Client's Journey to Published Novel

It started with a dream. The literal kind that comes at night. Ann Harrison-Barnes was climbing a ladder, toward what she didn't know, but in this dream state, there was a compelling force telling her to climb, and so she did.

It was this dream that became the opening of Harrison-Barnes' latest novel, A Journey of Faith: A Stepping Stones Mystery. This latest book—four of which are available on Amazon—is also the continuance of the metaphorical kind of dream. The kind that comes in quiet moments. The kind that gets them up in the morning.

Like many career paths, the one that put Harrison-Barnes where she is today wasn't straight, and it's quite different than the one she believed she was on when she graduated from The Georgia Academy for the Blind (GAB) in Macon in 1995. It was around that time that she first started working with Vocational Rehabilitation in Georgia. In the two decades since, she's had numerous counselors, learned a host of career and independent living skills and, most importantly, discovered what she wanted to do.

Her first jobs following her time at GAB and a stint at Kaplan University were in customer service and in call centers. And she hated it. Writing had long been a hobby, something she had tinkered in but never considered as a viable career option. In 2004, she fell in love with a book called New Stories of The South 2001, and she began to write in earnest, both as a freelancer publishing nonfiction and hard news and as a novelist.

At first, like all things, it was challenging. She had missteps, and she at times struggled to find her voice, but she was committed. She surrounded herself with

other writers and joined writing groups for individuals with disabilities, and she kept going.

As she wrote, she began to realize that her disability could be a boon to her writing, heightening her other senses and allowing her to craft stories in ways and with voices that don't exist in the traditional world of mainstream publishing.

"Even though I am blind, my characters are not. My attention to detail has made it a lot easier to write," she said. "Because I'm totally blind, sound is one of the biggest thing to me. The vibrations of sound. Music is in my blood. Not just traditional music either. But there's music in the environment. If you close your eyes and listen to the rain, there's music in that. There's music out on the street. If you listen to a police siren, there's a rhythm."

While her path was unconventional, Harrison-Barnes said that others can also choose where they want to go, and with hard work, they can get there as well.

"Follow their heart. Don't give up on what you want. Follow your calling. If you're called to write, that's what you're supposed to do," she said. "Don't write from your head. It's got to come from your heart if it's going to matter."

To learn more or to purchase her books, visit Harrison-Barnes website at www.annwritesinspiration.com.



Employment First Council Formed Getting the Ball Rolling

Several state leaders, disability community members, and other stakeholders earlier this month were named to Georgia's Employment First Council, created in May 2018 when Gov. Nathan Deal signed House Bill 831, the Employment First Act, into law. The legislation established employment as the first and preferred option for individuals with disabilities receiving public services who choose careers as a path to independence. Georgia joins a strong national movement that includes 45 other states with some form of Employment First initiative, legislation, or executive order.

The Employment First Council will ultimately be comprised of 14 individuals with disabilities, ties to the community, or roles in state agencies serving people with disabilities. In addition to the members named in November, six individuals representing various state organizations have previously accepted spots on the council. Two additional members are expected to be appointed soon.

"Georgia is home to nearly 700,000 working -age individuals with disabilities and more than 28,000 people with disabilities entered our state's workforce last year," said Gov. Nathan Deal. "These individuals bring value and unique talents to our places of work and enrich our local communities. Georgia's Employment First Council aims to provide citizens with disabilities with greater opportunities to obtain meaningful employment and enjoy long-term success in the workplace. By supporting individuals with disabilities in their efforts to pursue careers of their choosing, we are helping to build a more competitive workforce and strengthening Georgia's reputation as the No. 1 state for business."

Chaired by Georgia Vocational

Rehabilitation Agency's (GVRA) Executive Director, the role of the Council is to make recommendations to the Office of the Governor and the General Assembly for policies and legislation that align with inclusive, competitive employment for people with disabilities. Its leadership will also consist of a Vice Chair, who will be elected from the membership. The Council is to meet quarterly.

"Employment First is all about empowering people who want more opportunity," GVRA Executive Director Sean T. Casey said in November. "This Council will look at the structure of public services in the state to make innovative recommendations that ensure everyone who wants a career has every opportunity possible to achieve."

Appointments:

Dr. Conrado Marion-Landais

Marion-Landais is the diversity and inclusion manager for Georgia Power. He is the founding chairperson of Disability: IN Greater Atlanta, an affiliate of Disability: IN. Marion-Landais is a member of the Atlanta Diversity Management Advocacy Group leadership board and the Islamic Speakers Bureau of Atlanta advisory council. He is a graduate of Leadership DeKalb and the American Institute for Managing Diversity's Leadership Academy Program. Marion-Landais earned a bachelor's degree from Georgia Tech and a master's degree and a doctoral degree from the University of South Florida. He and his wife, Melissa, have two children and live in Dunwoody.

James Stinchcomb

Stinchcomb is a graduation coach and



part-time faculty member in the Department of Social Work and Human Services at Kennesaw State University (KSU). He is also the CEO of Baux Blue Consulting. Stinchcomb was previously the director of operations for the Cobb and Douglas Counties Community Services Boards. He is the vice president of Professional Development and Education for the National Organization for Human Services. Stinchcomb earned a bachelor's degree in Human Services and a master's degree in Public Administration from KSU and a master's degree in Social Work from the University of Georgia. He is a boardcertified human resources practitioner and a certified nonprofit professional. Stinchcomb resides in Kennesaw.

David C. Ward

Ward is the President and CEO of the Tommy Nobis Center. He has more than 30 years of experience in the nonprofit sector, including leadership positions with the Wounded Warrior Project, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, the Make -A-Wish Foundation and Best Buddies International. Ward previously worked with the Wood County Board of Developmental Disabilities in Ohio. He sits on the board for the Georgia Association of Training, Employment and Supports. Ward was a nominee for the Turknett Leadership Group's 2018 Leadership Character Award. He earned a bachelor's degree from Bluffton University and a master's degree from Bowling Green State University. Ward and his wife, Priscilla, have two children and live in Powder Springs.

John B. Wells III

Wells is the district manager for Colonial Insurance in Midwest Georgia. He is an ordained deacon in the Southern Baptist Church. Wells founded the East Kentucky Veterans Referral Center and served as mayor pro tem of the City of Paintsville for one term. He also taught history for

the University of Kentucky Community College System and for Morehead State University. Wells is a former member of the committee to restore the Coweta County Courthouse and the board for the Newnan High School Football Touchdown Club. He served in both Kentucky and Georgia as a coach for Special Olympics. He is a former president of his Kiwanis Club. He and his wife, Terrie, have one child and reside in Newnan.

Todd Youngblood

Youngblood is the executive director of Kay Community Service Center in Fort Valley. He previously taught special education and coached football, basketball and baseball. Youngblood is the assistant softball coach at Crawford County High School. He is the sport manager for the 2019 Special Olympics USA Powerlifting World Games. Youngblood earned a bachelor's degree in Interrelated Special Education from Georgia Southern University. He and his wife, Andrea, have three children and two grandchildren. They live in Fort Valley.

State Agency Representatives Previously Named:

Tim Evans, Georgia Department of Labor Eric E. Jacobson, Georgia Counsel of Developmental Disabilities Paula Poulicek, Georgia Department of Education

Amy R. Reidesel, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities

Rossany Rios, Technical College System of Georgia

Felita Williams, Board of Regents



RWS Employee of the Quarter Congrats to Amanda Knox!



Congratulations to Amanda Knox, the most recent employee of the quarter at Roosevelt Warm Springs (pictured top left). As part of the celebration, past winners parade through campus (pictured below).



Welcome Aboard! Michele Mason is New Board Liaison

In an effort to further strengthen relationships with those we serve and create a direct communications channel between their representative boards and councils and Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency's (GVRA) leadership, GVRA has named employment services veteran Michelle Mason as liaison after an extensive recruiting process. Mason, who first joined the organization in 2008, will support the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services (GVRS) Board, the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) and the Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC).

Mason started her career in employment services in 1996 as a Supported Employment Specialist with UCP of NYC, Inc. She has since committed to serving the disability community and special populations in the role of Job Developer, Recruitment Coordinator, Apprenticeship Program Recruiter, Workforce Development Manager, Contract Manager, and Vocational Counselor. Michele successfully coordinated outreach and collaborative strategy for several citywide economic development initiatives in New York City, such as the U.S. Open at Shea Stadium, Steiner Studios production assistant program, and the NYC Training Grant program.

Michele joined GVRA as a Rehabilitation Employment Specialist, and in 2014, was promoted to Employment Services Manager for the Metro Quadrant. Said Executive Director Sean T. Casey, "The Board, SRC and SILC are vital to us as a client-first organization. We'll be counting on Michele, who's a proven communicator, to ensure the voice of the consumer is represented in the way we do business."

Tom Wilson has chaired the GVRS Board since May 2017. "Michele is the right person

to help us stay connected to the programs and initiatives happening at GVRA," he said. "With her help, we'll have the resources needed to successfully advise and support the agency in its mission."

Mason will also coordinate with the SRC, which was created to represent the voice of the VR consumer. "I believe Michele's personal and professional passion for serving individuals with disabilities has prepared her to be the liaison we need to move to bigger and better things as a council," SRC Chair Rossany Rios said.

Mason studied Human Services at Audrey Cohen College of Human Services and obtained a degree in Organizational Leadership from Point University. She begins her new role effective immediately.





GVRA employees really got into the Halloween spirit this year. Here are some pictures from the special day.





NDEAM Indeed Atlanta City Council Issues Proclamation

In honor and recognition of National Disability Employment Awareness Month, the Atlanta City Council has presented Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA) with a proclamation. It reads:

Whereas, Workplaces welcoming the talents of all people, including people with disabilities, are a critical part of our efforts to build an inclusive community and strong economy. In this spirit, the Atlanta City Council recognizes October as National Disability Employment Awarement Month as we raise awareness about disability employment issues and celebrate the many and varied contributions of people with disabilities: and

Whereas, Activities during this month will reinforce the value and talent that people with disabilities add to our workplaces and communities and affirm the city of Atlanta's commitment to an inclusive community; and

Whereas, the history of National Disability Employment Awareness Month traces back to 1945, when Congress enacted a law declaring the first week of each October "National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week". In 1962, the word "physically" was removed to acknowledge the employment needs and contributions of individuals with all types of disabilities. In 1988, Congress expanded the week to a month and changed the name to National Disability Employment Awareness Month; and

Whereas, Americans of all abilities must have access to good safe jobs, and smart employers know that including different perpectives in problem-solving situations leads to better solutions. Hiring employees with diverse abilities strengthens their business, increases competition, and drives innovation; and

Whereas, the City of Atlanta is proud to be a part of this year's National Disability Employment Awareness Month. We want to spread the important message that we value all perspectives, including those of individuals with disabilities.

Now, therefore, be it resolved that we, the members of the Atlanta City Council, on behalf of the citizens of Atlanta, do hereby proclaim October 2018 as National Disability Employment Awareness Month in the City of Atlanta. In so doing, we call upon employers, schools, and other community organizations in our city to observe this month with appropriate programs and to advance its important message that people with disabilities are equal to the task throughout the year.

Signed:

Felicia A. Moore, President, Atlanta City Council

Carla Smith, Council District 1 Amir R. Farokhi, Council District 2 Ivory Lee Young, Jr., Council District 3 Cleta Winslow, Council District 4 Natalyn Mosby Archibong, Council District

Jennifer N. Ide, Council District 6 Howard Shook, Council District 7 J.P. Matzigkeit, Council District 8 Dustin Hillis, Council District 9 Andrea L. Boone, Council District 10 Marci Collier Overstreet, Council District 11 Joyce M. Sheperd, Council District 12 Michael Julian Bond, Post 1 At-Large Matt Westmoreland, Post 2 At-Large Andre Dickens, Post 3 At-Large

Calling All Job Seekers GVRA at the iHeartRadio Career Fair

Macon GVRA celebrated Disability Awareness Month by participating in the iHeartRadio career fair on Thursday October 25, 2018. The team informed the public of GVRA services as well as met with talented individuals who possessed skills and abilities that could be utilized for GVRA vacancies. They were informed on how to search and apply for GVRA jobs. Pictured are Ann Wood and Belinda Oates.



National Recognition GRA Wins National Award

The 2018 National Rehabilitation Association Annual Conference was held in Oklahoma City, OK from Oct. 11-14. The Georgia Rehabilitation Association won the Chapter of the Year Award. Keita Alston, 2018 GRA Vice President-elect, attended the conference.





Start Now.

Start a New Career.

Call the GIB Referral Hotline.

1.888.226.3444

Calendar of Events Save the Date

November 26th - November 28th Leadership Summit Savannah Harborfront Westin Savannah, GA

November 28th, 1 p.m. Savannah Employee Town Hall Savannah Harborfront Westin Savannah, GA

November 28th - 30th 2018 TASH Conference Marriott Portland Downtown Waterfront Portland, OR December 5th and 6th Georgia Association for Positive Behavior Support Conference Georgia World Congress Center Atlanta, GA

December 12th GVRS Board Meeting Location TBD Atlanta, GA



On the Radio Talking NDEAM on Rose Scott

GVRA Executive Director Sean Casey and GVRA Legislative Liaison Charlie Miller were recently on Closer Look with Rose Scott to discuss the significance of National Disability Employment Awareness Month and the significance of the passage of Employment First Legislation.

NDEAM, Sean said, represented a great opportunity to spread the message about what GVRA does and to engage both advocates and business leaders alike.

"Part of our job is not only to educate our clients but also to educate business leaders. My coworkers across the state are developing intimate relationships with these communities ... and it's our job to make sure we're educating them about why they should be using us."

While some employers might be concerned about liability or the cost of accommodations, Sean said that hiring an individual with a disability typically is financially beneficial for most companies, through the use of federal tax credits.

Employment First, in a similar vein, works to grow and build the local economy, ensuring that employment is the first option presented to people with disabilities.

"It's not a GVRA bill. It's not a Senate bill. It was truthfully a community bill," Charlie said. "We wanted to get the buy in from the community, and we wanted the community to be on the front lines when it came to fighting for this bill."

What's more, Sean said, Employment First will have a lasting legacy in the disability community in Georgia.

"This bill will have an impact for generations to come," he said. "This will change the lives of Georgians for generations to come."

Listen to the full interview here: https://www.wabe.org/episode/closer-look-atlanta-hawks-ceo-steve-koonin-georgia-encouraging-disability-employment-with-legislation-and-more/.



White Cane Day Promoting Independence

The month of October is filled with many events highlighting individuals with disabilities. In addition to the celebration of National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), this month is also "Meet the Blind Month", and October 15 is "White Cane Safety Day."

To honor this day, the Center for the Visually Impaired held the proclamation reading of White Cane Safety Day at 200 Piedmont Ave. White Cane Safety Day is a national observance in the United States that has been celebrated on October 15th of each year since 1964. October 15th is set aside to commend the achievements of people who are blind or visually impaired and note the importance of the symbol of blindness and tool of independence, the white cane.

In addition to the reading of the proclamation, a photography exhibit was also on display on the plaza level. These testimonials provided an emotional and heartwarming journey that firmly planted the reader in the shoes of those living with vision loss.

"White Cane Day promotes the independence that can be achieved by individuals who are blind and visually impaired in our country. Since it falls within the month of October, when we are celebrating NDEAM, it also serves as a platform to educate employers about blindness and low vision," said GVRA Assistant Director of Blind Services Shirley Robinson



From left: Fontaine Huey, President, Center for the Visually Impaired (CVI); Adam Hinchliffe, CVI Executive Affairs Manager; Amir R. Farokhi, Atlanta City Councilman; Andrew Kauss, Chair of CVI Board; Chuck Stone, GVRA Customer Care Supervisor; Shirley Robinson, GVRA Assistant Director of Blind Services; Kay McGill, GVRA/Project Independence Program Manager

"Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on Earth. ~ Muhammad Ali

Thank You to GVRA Veterans

This Veteran's Day we acknowledge GVRA staff members who served. We appreciate not only what they do to serve Georgians with disabilities, but also their service to America.

Sean Hamilton

Teresa Eggleston

Minerva Wheedleton

Freddy Honeycutt

Charlotte Thompson

Robert Schacht

Thomas Wilson

David McConnell

Charles Graddick

Rechell Thomas

Antonio Waller

George Ude

Shelia Lamons

Arthur Brawley

Cedric Williams

Michael Pringle

Show your support, thank these and other Veterans for their service!

www.gvs.ga.gov



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